Justice Called Shot On Closing Camp

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The decision to close down the vast antiwar encampment in West Potomac Park at dawn yesterday was made 12 hours earlier at a closed-door meeting in a fourth-floor office of the Justice Department.

In the office of Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst, a handful of ranking officials from Justice, Defense, Interior and Washington metropolitan police departments met from 5 p.m. to about 6 p.m. Saturday to discuss the action.

A basic decision was made to revoke the permit for the encampment and to fly in federal troops as possible support for police who would handle the actual closing down of the park.

The result: an estimated 40,000 to 45,000 persons were quietly expelled from West Potomac Park and those few remaining were arrested without violence.

The reason stated by police for revocation of the permit for the park's use was that the continued presence of large crowds whose leaders have vowed widespread disruption of the city today and Tuesday "constituted a threat to general public safety."

Police tried to take precautions for almost every possible contingency. Police brought cache of tear gas and shotguns to the park. They were never needed.

Dupont Circle, Montrose Park and the Washington Monument grounds—all favorite gathering spots for young activists—were closed to the public yesterday. Foot policemen were stationed along downtown business streets to prevent window-breaking or "trashing" by youths leaving the park.

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Justice Department Called Shot On Dispersing Antiwar Campers

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These plans were kept under wraps overnight. Few officials beyond those at Kleindienst's office Saturday were informed of the new strategy, and government spokesmen generally refused to discuss details yesterday.

President Nixon, in San Clemente, Calif., was kept informed of developments.

Rank-and-file policemen, many of whom were kept on alert overnight Saturday in downtown hotels and motels, did not know what was planned until they were awakened before dawn and deployed to the park. Only Police Chief Jerry V. Wilson and some deputy chiefs, inspectors and captains knew of the plan in advance.

Kleindienst, the No. 2 man in the Justice Department, was the highest-ranking official of his department at the Saturday meeting. Spokesmen would not say what other officials were present.

Protesters at the park, led by the authorized by the Justice Department to use the parkland near the Lincoln Memorial until May 9. They had planned to use it as a launching point for mass traffic disruptions this morning and Tuesday.

Police spokesman Paul Fuqua outlined yesterday five factors he said contributed to official determination that the encampment posed a threat to public safety:

- The unexpected large number of persons present.
- Repeated public statements of protest leaders vowing widespread disruption of the city.
- The pattern of smaller-scale disruptions (causing more than 1,000 arrests) in the previous two weeks of demonstrations in Washington.
- Continuing violations of the permit since the protesters arrived more than a week ago, including use of tents and fires and camping on the parkland.
- Violation of public laws such as those prohibiting possession of marijuana and other drugs.

Justice Department sources also said privately that government officials figured that closing down the encampment would scatter the demonstrators and fragment their efforts to regroup for the planned disruptions of traffic this morning.

A spokesman for the Interior Department, which has jurisdiction over national parklands, said the Justice Department "called most of the signals" in planning the camp shutdown and in dealing with the protesters earlier.

Wilson said, however, that once the basic decision had been made, "I had latitude to do whatever happened to be necessary."

After the meeting in Kleindienst's office, Wilson said he met to map specific tactics with his own assistant and deputy chiefs, plus Secret Service representatives, General Services Administration officials and suburban police officials.

He acknowledged that the move against the park at 6:30 a.m. when many persons were asleep or winding down from an all-night rock concert, was done in part because of its surprise element.

"There was always the potential for trouble and (the dawn notice) had the advantage of not giving a lot of time for crowd organization," he said.

Mayday Tribe organizers reacted angrily to the police action, contending they had not been notified in advance as provided in the permit agreement with the Justice Department.

The six-page agreement said that if revocation of the permit was planned by the government, consultation would be sought first, "if possible or reasonable," with Mayday organizers. Philip Hirschkop, attorney for Mayday, and other leaders said they were not notified until after the action was taken.